

Planning Public Sculptures

Level: Middle School

Lesson Overview:

In this lesson, students will review what a public sculpture is and how it relates to the space/environment. Through exploring and developing skills in sculpture, students will create three-dimensional public art sculpture models inspired by artists Martin Puryear and Sean Scully. Working in design teams, students will use premade three-dimensional forms to explore the concepts of balance, positive/negative space, repetition and symmetry to create visually powerful and interesting sculptures that responded to the environments where they are placed.

Preparation:

Cut out as many paper box templates as possible in advance, as they are very time-consuming for the students. Prioritize the longer shapes, as these will be the most useful.

Essential Questions:

How can I arrange materials to create a sense of both visual and physical balance?
How, as an artist, do I take into consideration the architecture of a building and/or site when making a large public sculpture?
How can I create a public sculpture for a specific community setting or place?
How does looking at and talking about sculptures help my understanding of their construction and purpose in public spaces?
How can I create a sculpture using limited materials and/or solids?
How can I use 3-D solids to build sculptures that have balance?
How can I use 3-D solids to build sculptures that have positive and negative space?
How do artists work together to make large works?

Students will...

- understand the three-dimensional nature of sculpture
- find creative solutions while working with design restrictions
- understand the difference between positive and negative space in a sculpture
- explore the concept of balance within a three-dimensional sculpture
- understand that artists consider many factors when planning a public artwork/installation

Materials:

Paper templates, glue, board for base, construction paper, pattern paper if available (optional: oil pastel for part 2)

Reference Images:

Martin Puryear, *Swallowed Sun (Monstrance and Volute)*, 2019 (Southern yellow pine, steel, polyester, canvas, rope- sculpture)

Sean Scully, *Opulent Ascension*, 2019, San Giorgio Maggiore (stacked frames wrapped in colored felt- sculpture)

Session:

Step 1: Close-looking and Engagement

This teacher will begin the session by asking, “What is a sculpture? How is this artwork different from a painting or drawing?” The students will then look at two works of art featured in the La Biennale di Venezia (Venice Biennale). The two artworks that were created for and in response to two public buildings – Martin Puryear’s *Swallowed Sun (Monstrance and Volute)* and Sean Scully’s *Opulent Ascension*.

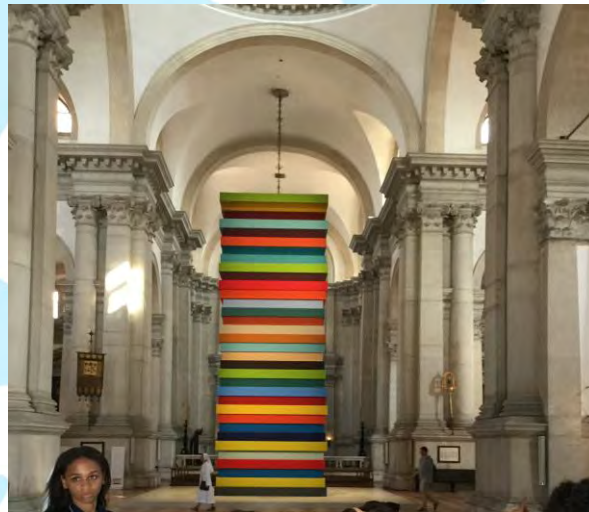
Beginning by viewing Puryear’s *Swallowed Sun*, the teacher will ask, “What shapes do you see? What shapes or principles of design are you noticing (geometric shapes, symmetry/asymmetry, scale, repetition)? Which part is the positive space? Which part is the negative space? What are the two parts of the structure? Do they individually remind you of anything? How are the two elements working together? How does the meaning change when they are viewed together?”

The teacher will then ask the students to consider how an artist plans when installing a public artwork. “What elements does an artist need to consider when planning a public sculpture? How is the structure interacting with the Pavilion? Are there similar elements in both Puryear’s structure and the Pavilion?”

Swallowed Sun (Monstrance and Volute) uses repeating arcs (curved cut parts), starting wide at the bottom and then narrowing at the top. Draw students’ attention to both sides of the work- notice how it is placed in front of the building, its height at the front and the interior parts that create the courtyard.



The teacher will then display an image of *Opulent Ascension* by Sean Scully. The teacher will ask, “What shapes do you see? What shapes are you noticing (geometric shapes, symmetry/asymmetry, scale, repetition)? What part is the positive space? What part is the negative space? Does the work remind you of anything? How does this sculpture use related similar shapes and colors? Where did your eye go when you follow the colored boxes (Upwards to the building’s dome)?”



After students lead the discussion of both sculptures, ask the students “Are there any similarities between the Puryear and Scully works? Can you discuss how the artists have used the space/place to inform their work? What do you notice about the way these artists used the building in different ways?” The teacher will then ask, “How

would you create a sculpture that shows balance and positive and negative space? What factors would you consider when creating a public artwork?"

Step 2: Art-making

Martin Puryear and Sean Scully both used repetition, symmetry, and balance to create visually powerful and interesting sculptures that responded to the environments where they are placed. Explain to the students that they will work in design teams of two to explore how to create a public sculpture. Each group should be given 8 to 12 pre-folded solids. The teacher will demonstrate how to simply stack pre-made solids to make a sculpture that has balance, and creates positive and negative space. Explain that as artists, we think about balance in a few ways, first, physical balance – being able to stay in position or stand. Sculptors consider physical balance so their pieces are able to stand on their own. The second is visual balance that is created by the choice of shapes and negative space around the sculpture

Encourage the students to explore and be even more thoughtful and inventive with ways to arrange and rearrange the three-dimensional solids in their sculptures. Ask, "Can you make a sculpture that is symmetrical, meaning same shapes on both sides? What about creating a sculpture that has balance but is asymmetrical with different shapes on either side? How will the public interact with your sculpture? Where do you envision your sculpture and how will it interact with the space?"

Allow the students to stack and explore creating a sculpture. After you see some success and choices being made, have the students pause working and ask them to document their explorations by sketching their sculptures from more than one angle. Sculptures are unique in that people can experience them from all different sides. Ask the groups to consider how the public will view the artwork. Explain that artists document their progress and choices as they are brainstorming. As the project is planned, artists refer back to their sketches to see what works and how they might incorporate their original ideas into the final piece.

When the group has completed an arrangement, the students should glue then glue their sculpture elements with a small dot of glue where the boxes meet, and hold them together for a few seconds to dry.

Step 3: Reflection

The teacher will lead a gallery walk and ask, "How did you determine that your sculpture was finished? What details could you add to your sculpture to give it more visual interest?

How can my choice of space or environment influence how the sculpture is perceived? How does working on a team enhance your creativity? How does talking with your peers help you to be a better artist?"

Extension (or Session 2)

Step 1: Close-looking and Engagement

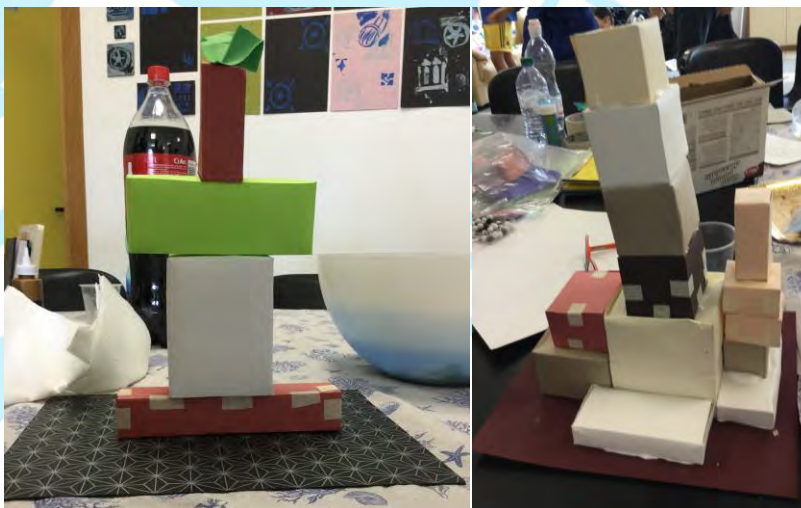
The teacher will revisit how artist considered the placement and environment surrounding their sculptures while viewing Puryear and Scully sculptures from the previous lesson. The teacher will ask the students, “How can your choice of space or environment influence how the sculpture is perceived? If your artwork were installed as a public art installation, how would you determine the best location?”

The teacher will then ask the paired students to decide on the environment for their sculpture- inside, outside, and how they want the public to interact with it. “Where would you want it to be? Would you like it to be inside or outside? Is your art to be enjoyed in a park? Would you place your work in a grove of trees, or at the sea, or in front of your school or in a garden? How do you want people to see or approach the sculpture? Do you want a path up to it or around it? How do we want people to feel when they see your sculpture? What might they think of?”

Step 2: Art-making

The students will complete their work by adding additional details to their work and creating an environment they have envisioned for their sculptures. Depending on what materials are available, students may want to use collage patterned/textured papers or oil pastels. The teacher should demonstrate how to cover a base board with paper (like gift-wrapping it), which they will either draw or collage on top of. They should think about scale. “How big is the sculpture in this environment?” They can also cut out a simple figure to indicate scale.

If the students have access to the internet and a printer, they can Google search a specific site and print it off. They can create a mock site proposal by, inserting or drawing an image of their sculpture in the space they have selected.



Step 3: Reflection

The teacher will lead a gallery walk and ask, “How does your sculpture engage the viewer? How does your sculpture interact with the environment? What elements of the environment inform your work? How does working as a group influence your design choices?” Encourage students to use the vocabulary of sculpture when speaking about their work.

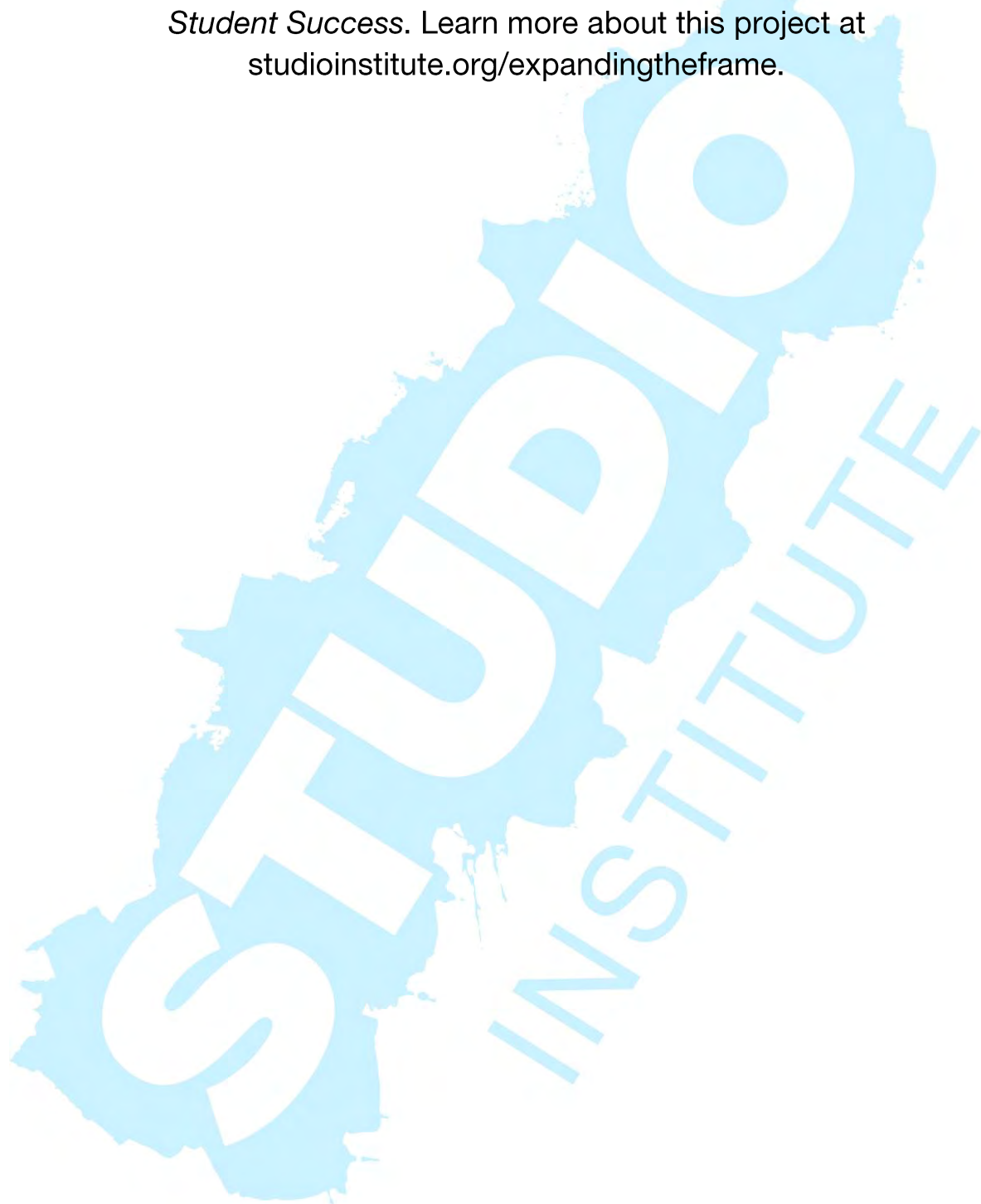
Vocabulary:

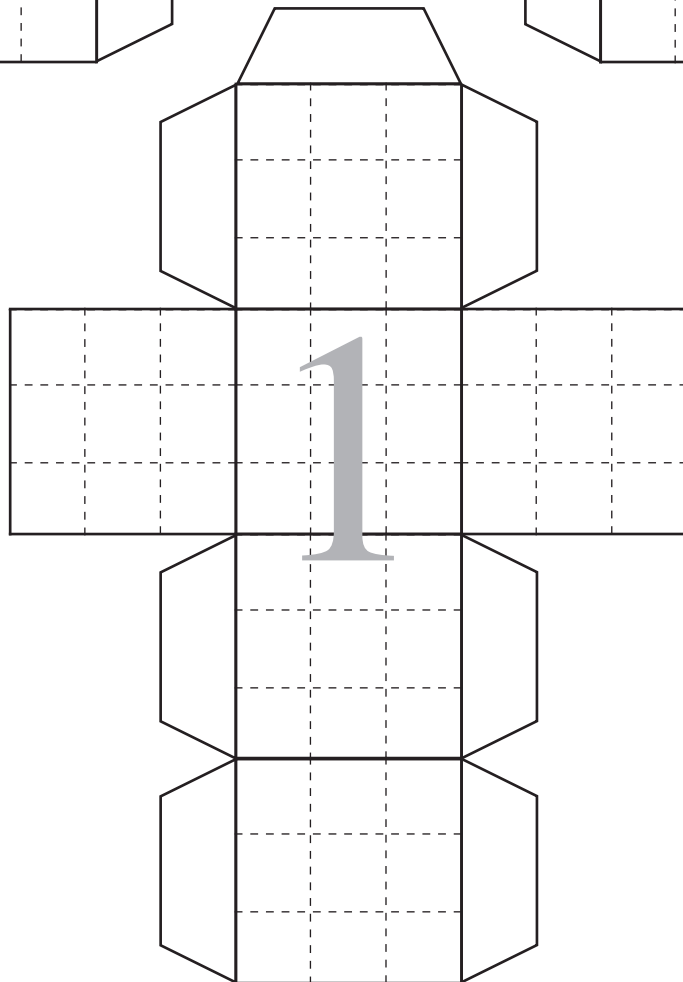
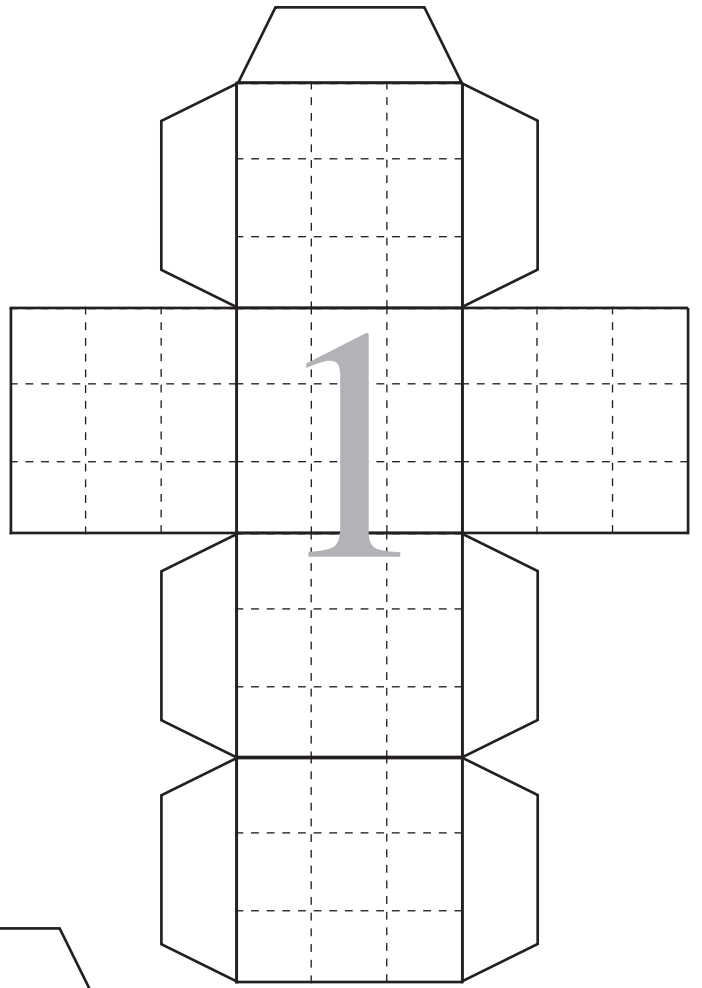
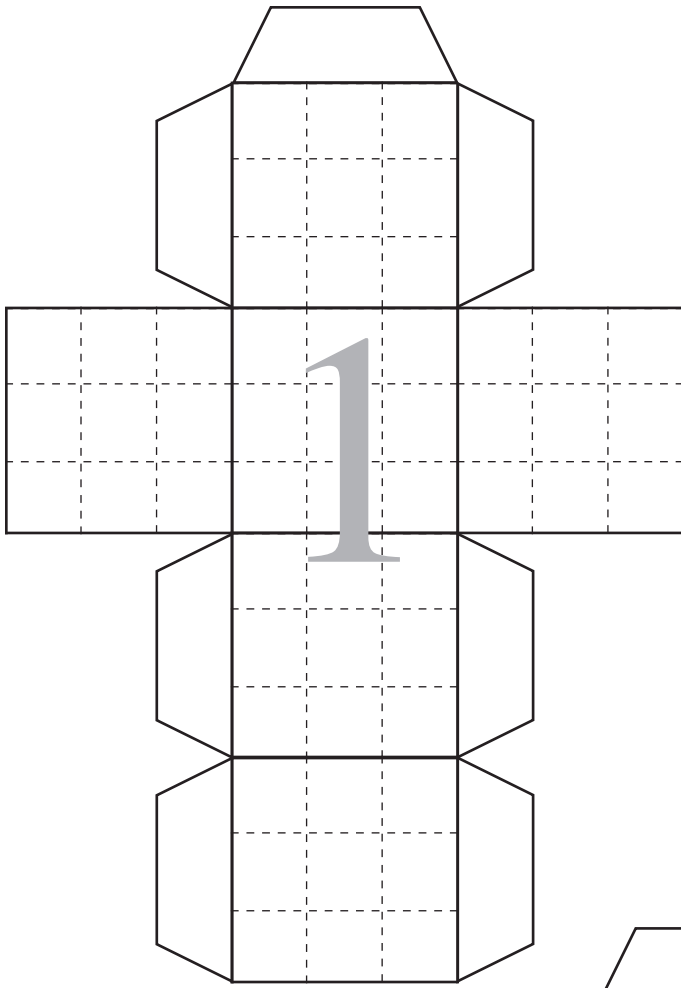
Sculpture, environment, design, arrange, positive space, negative space, geometric shapes, symmetry/asymmetry, scale, repetition, dome, placement, installation, location

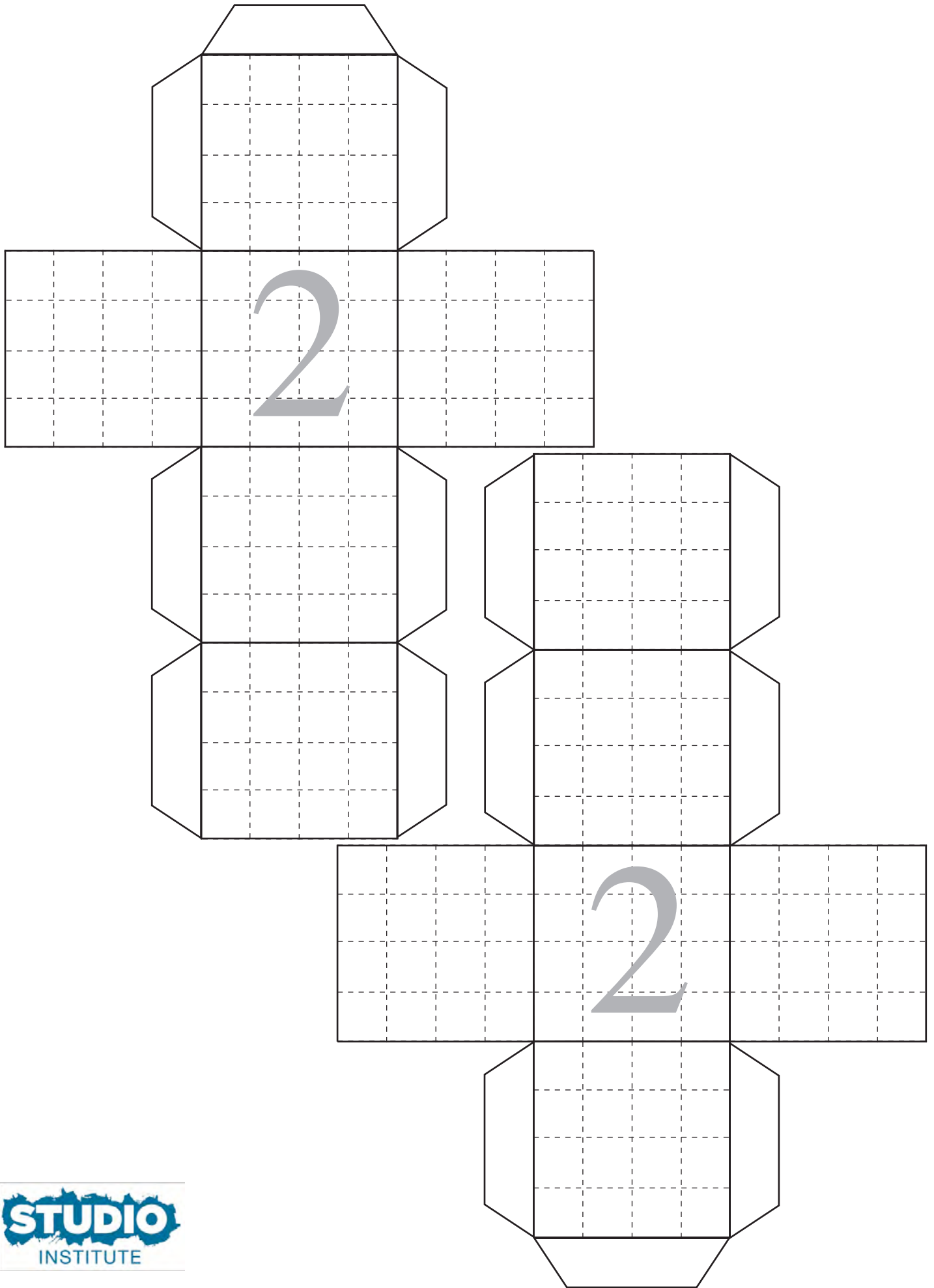


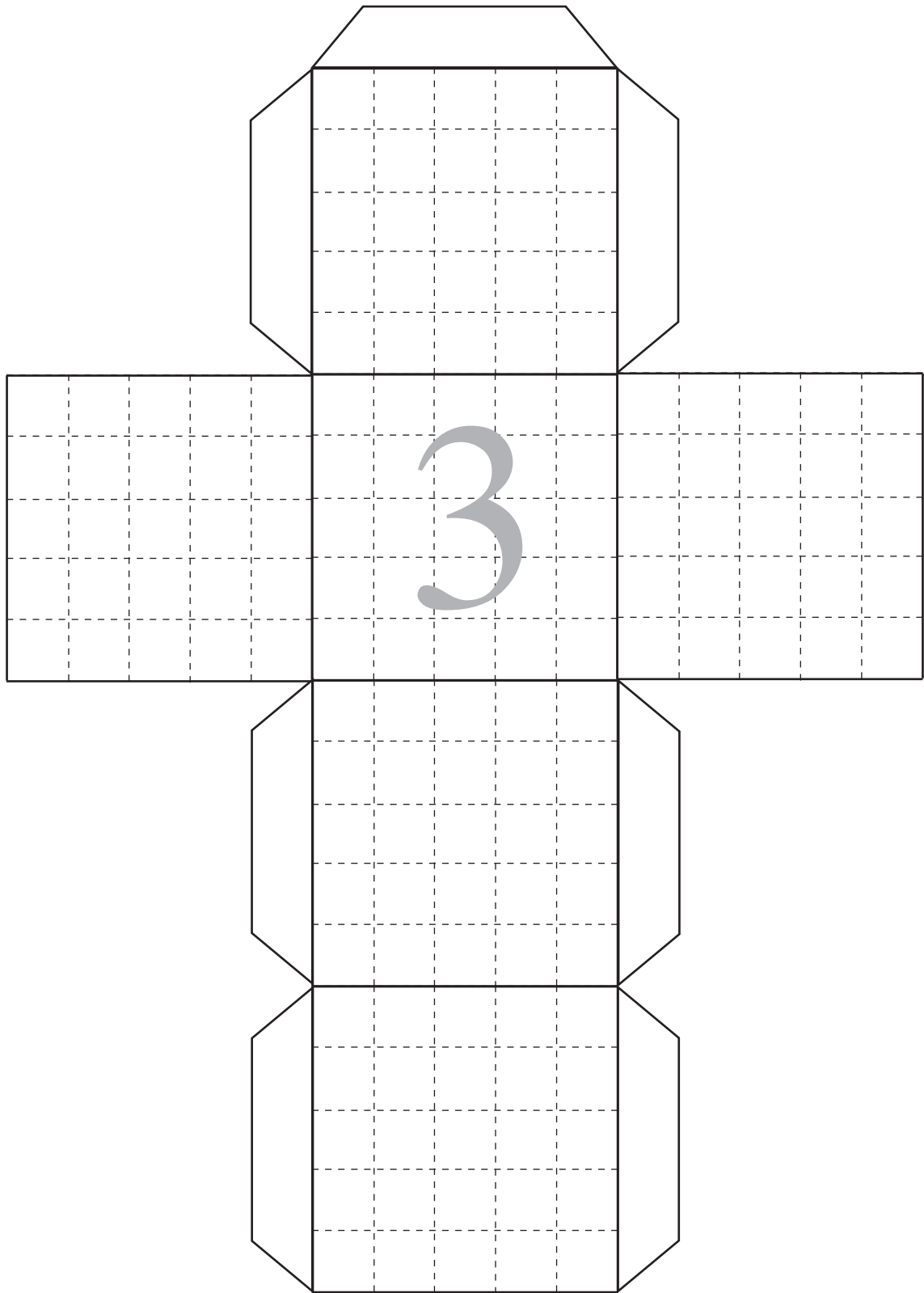
This lesson was developed through a partnership between Madison Square Park Conservancy and Studio Institute to tie formally and thematically with the 2019 United States Pavilion's exhibition, "Martin Puryear: Liberty/Libertà", at the 2019 Biennale Arte. Learn more about this at martinpuryearvenice2019.org and studioinstitute.org/arts-intern-venice-2019-biennale-arte

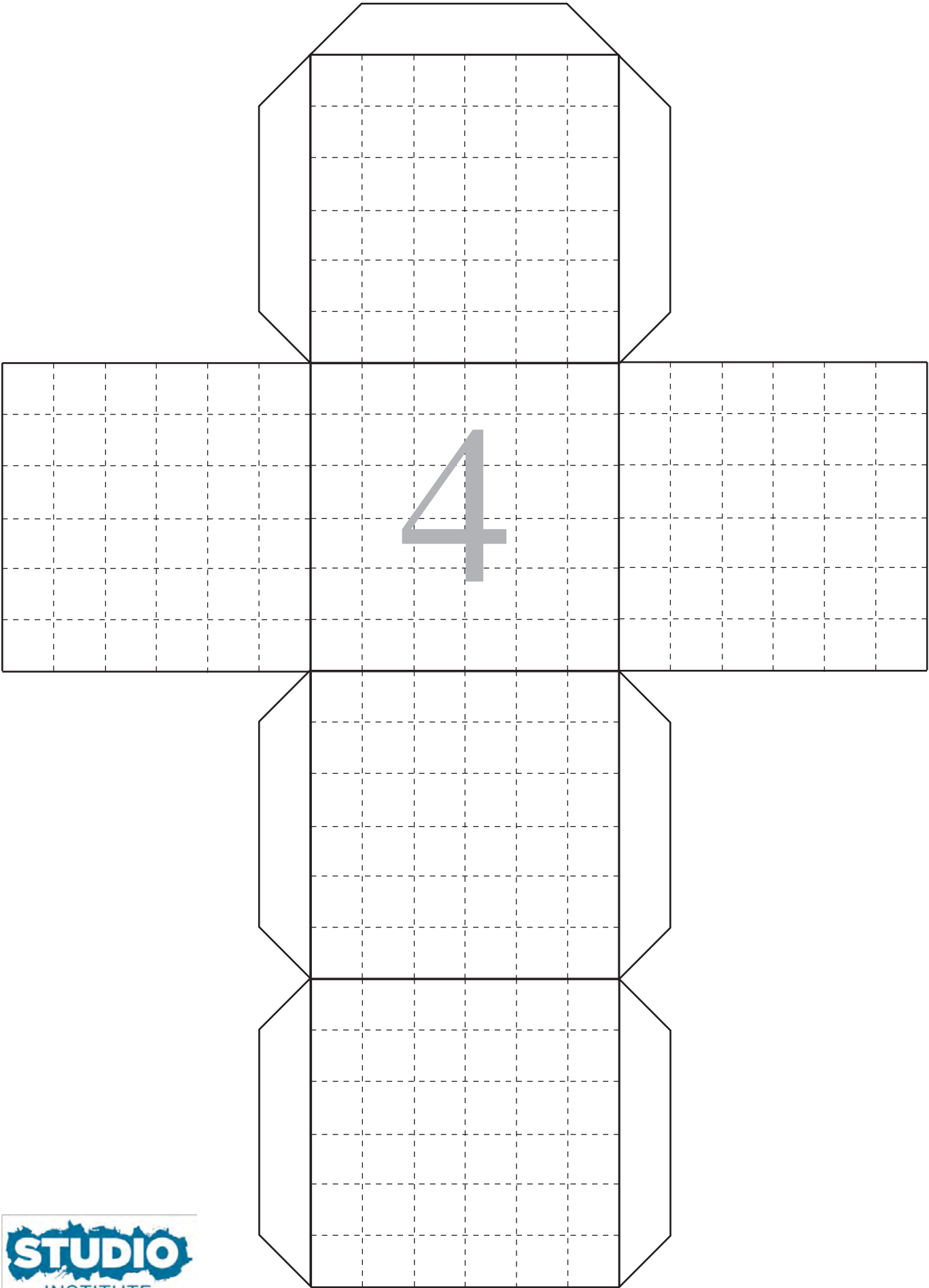
The following templates were initially created for a unit called *Playful Solids*, as part of a research project called *Expanding The Frame for Student Success*. Learn more about this project at studioinstitute.org/expandingtheframe.

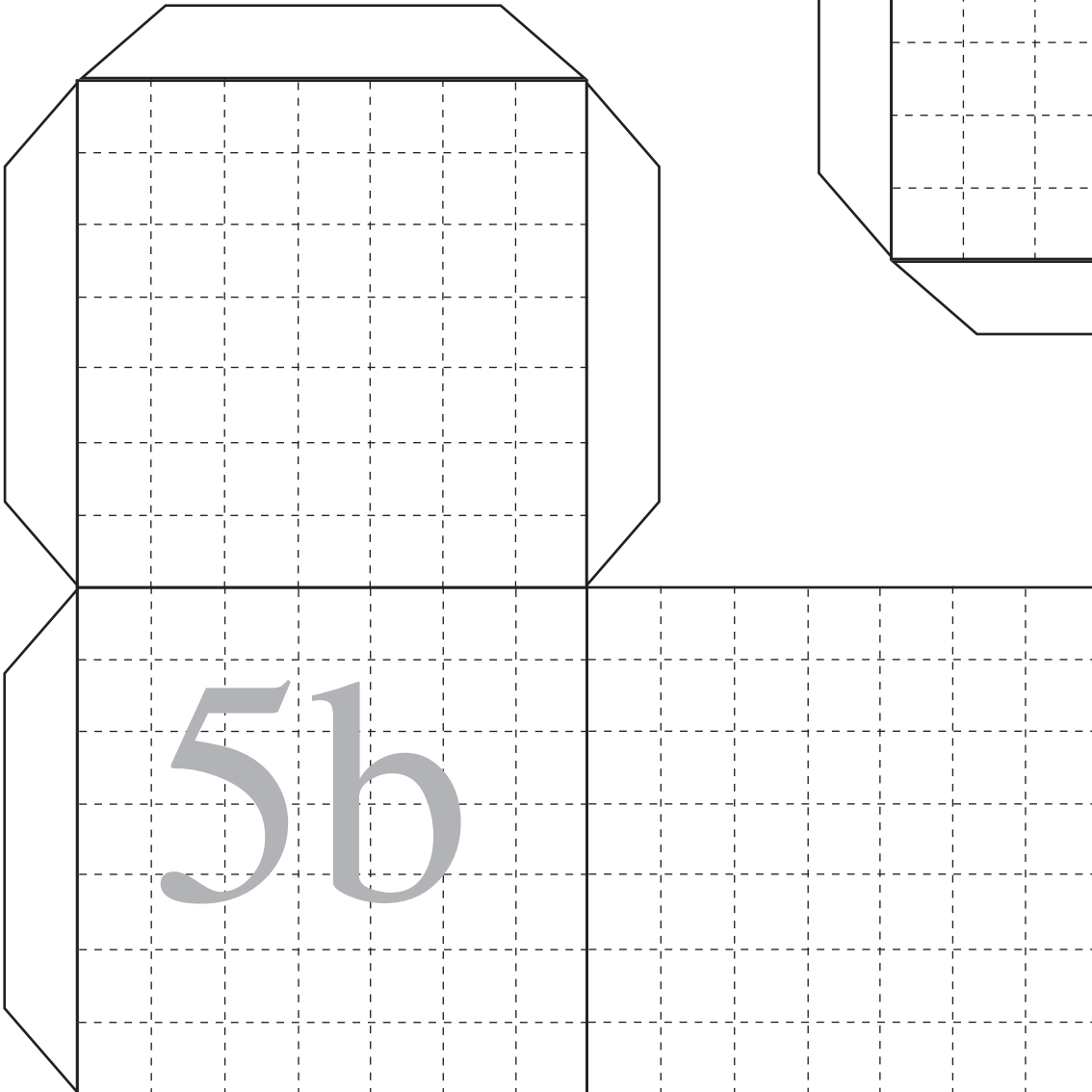
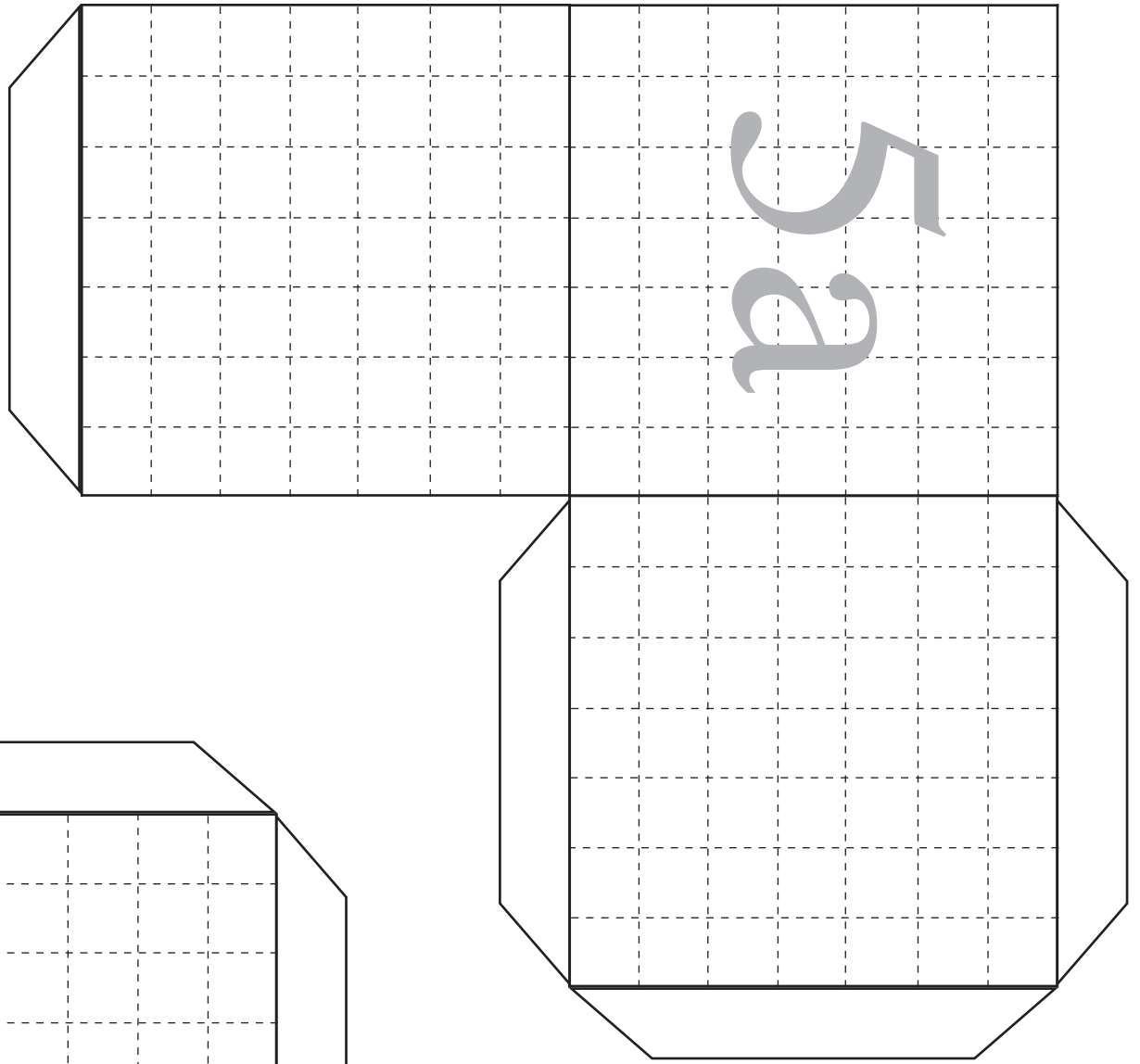






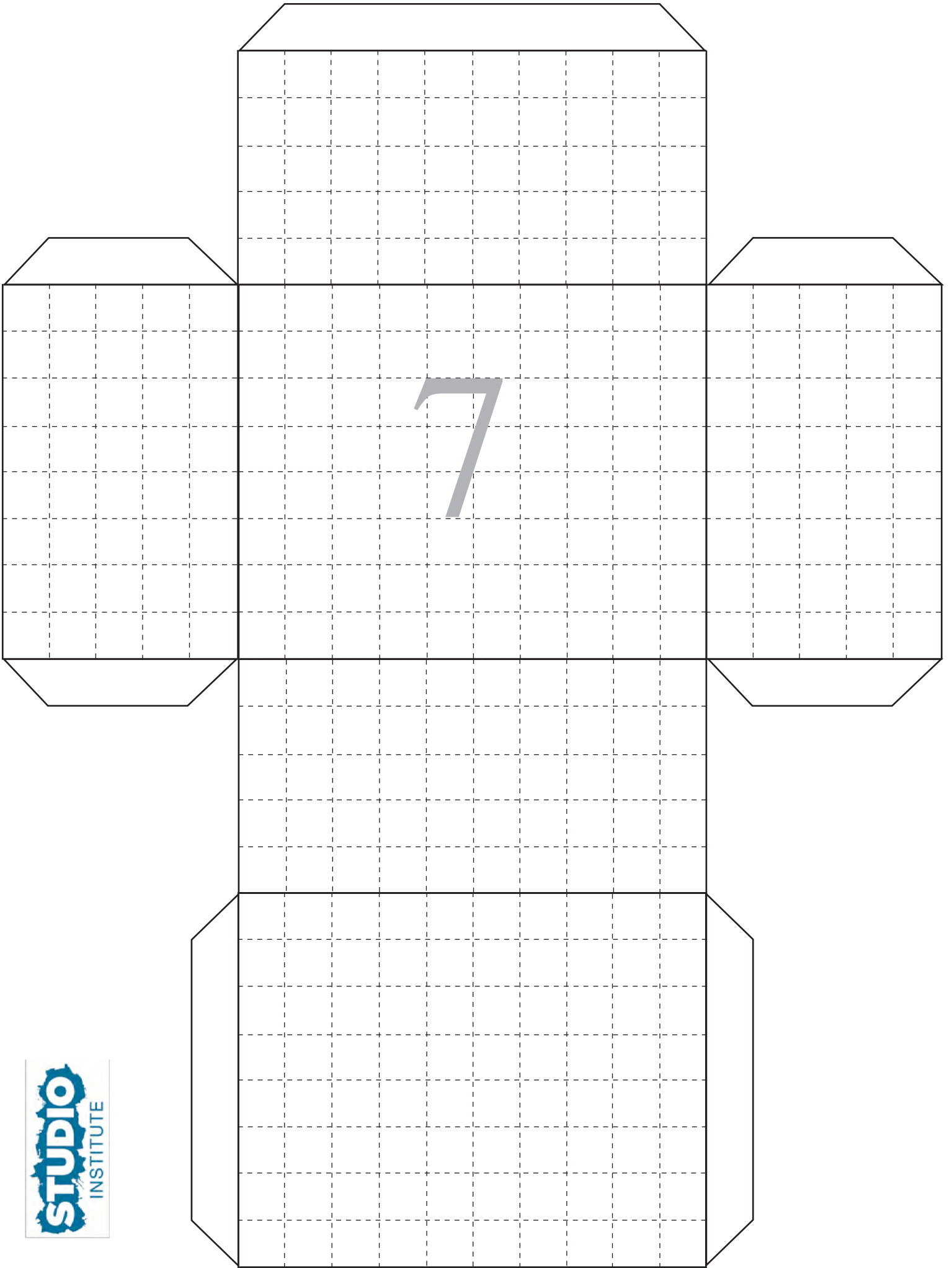


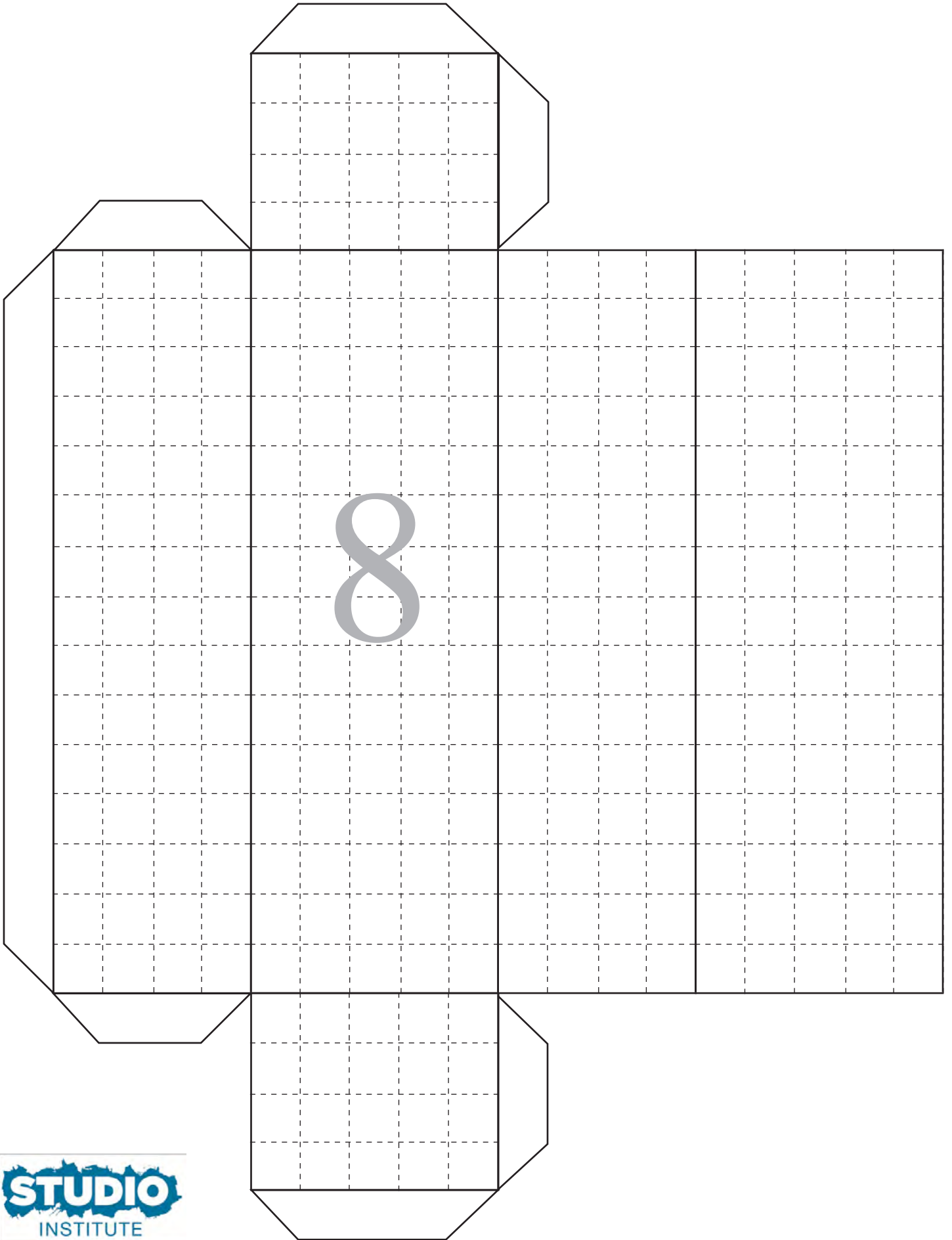


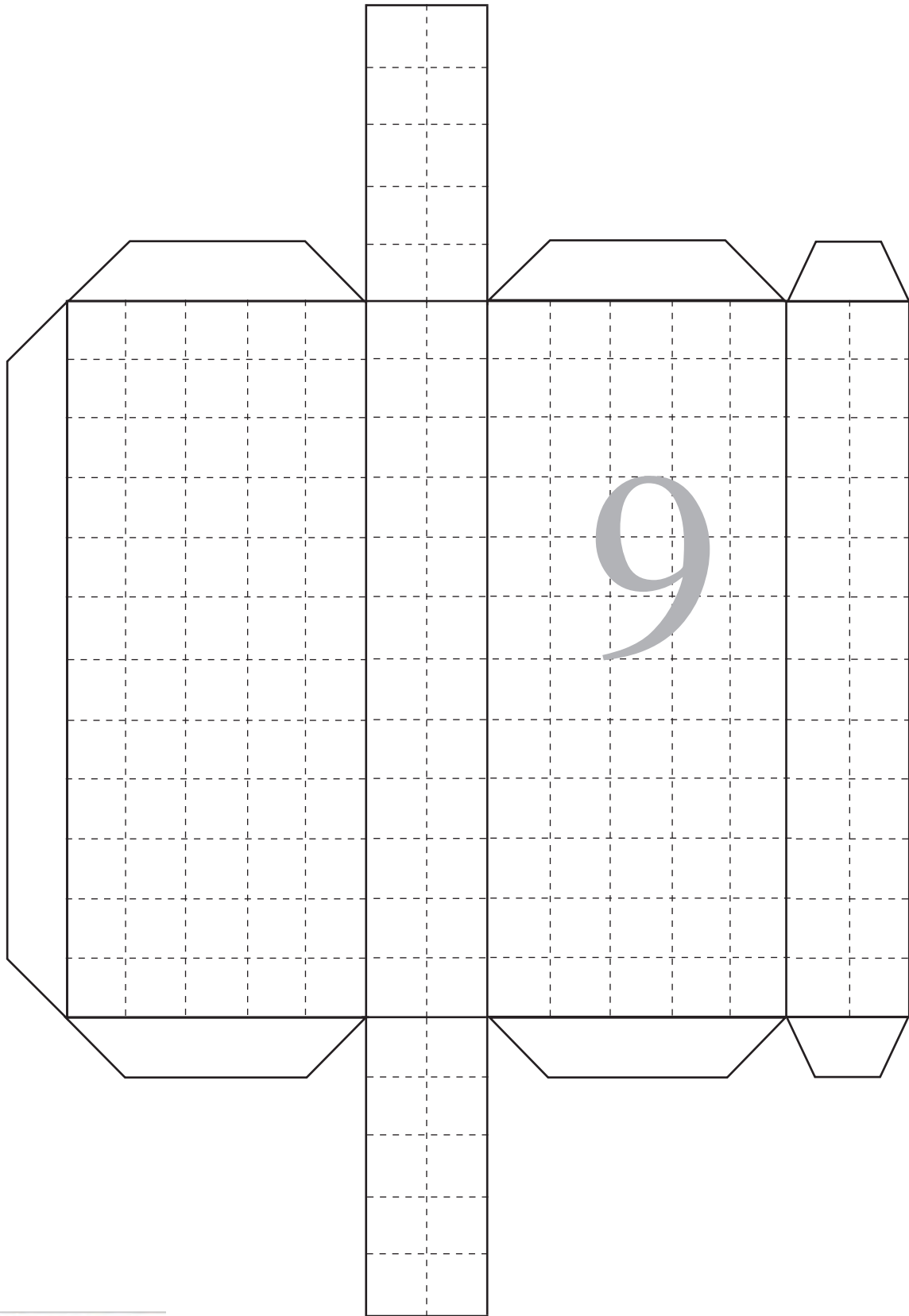


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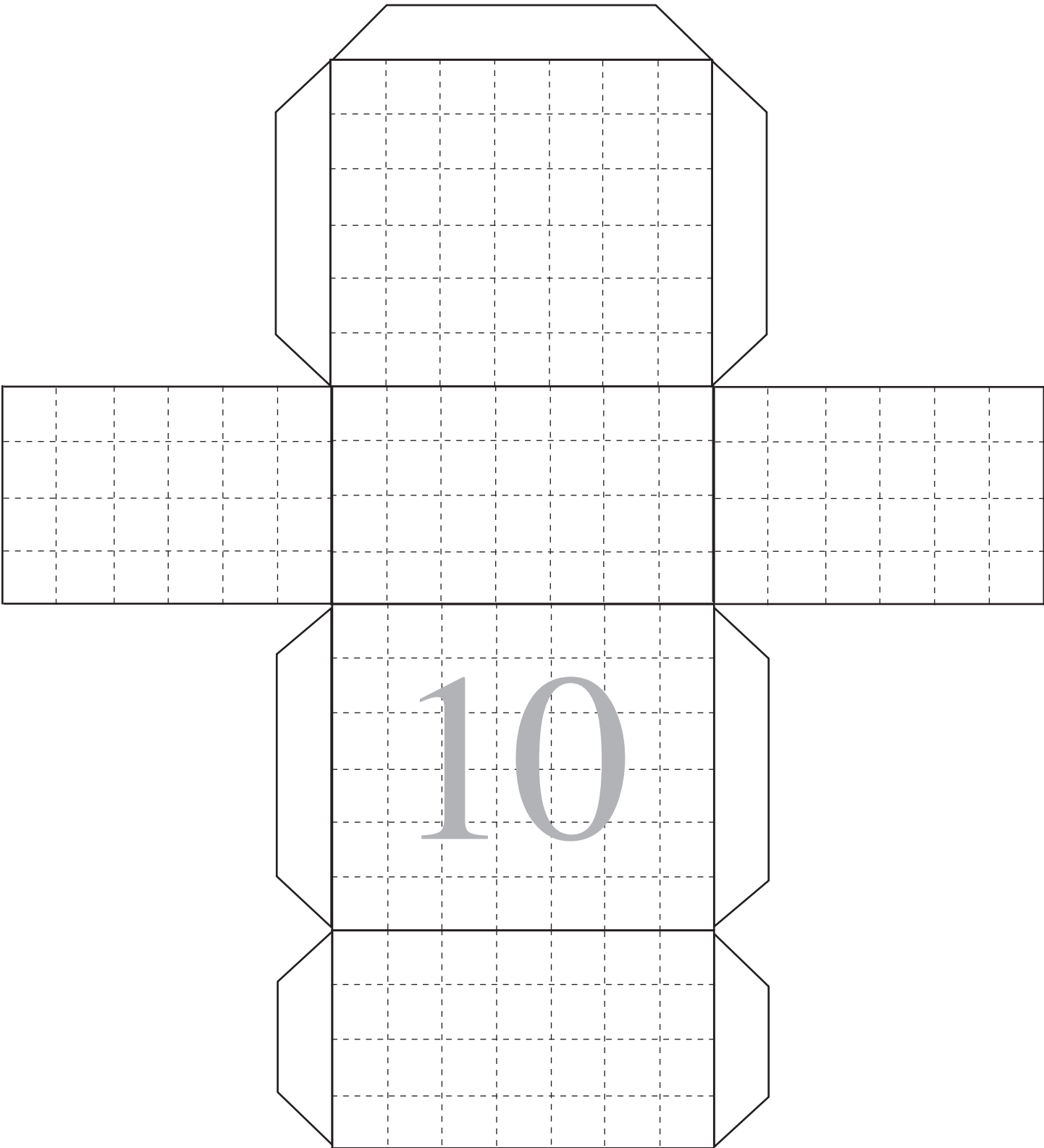
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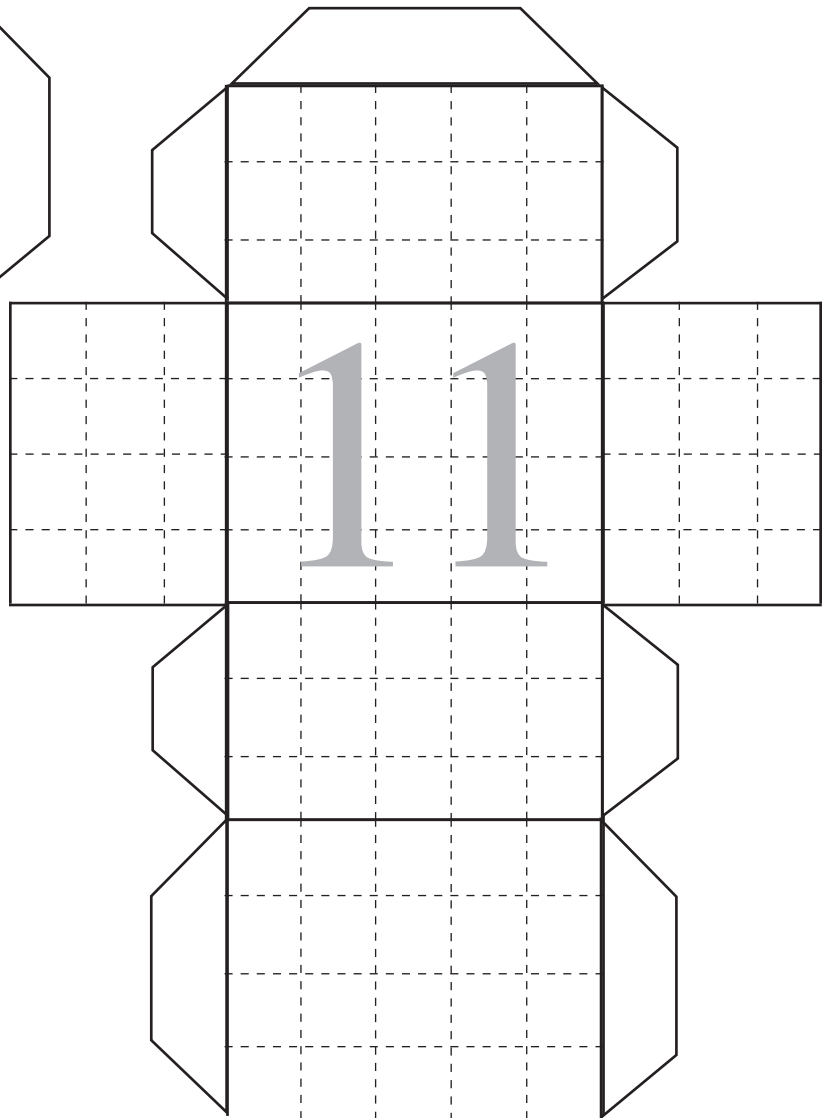
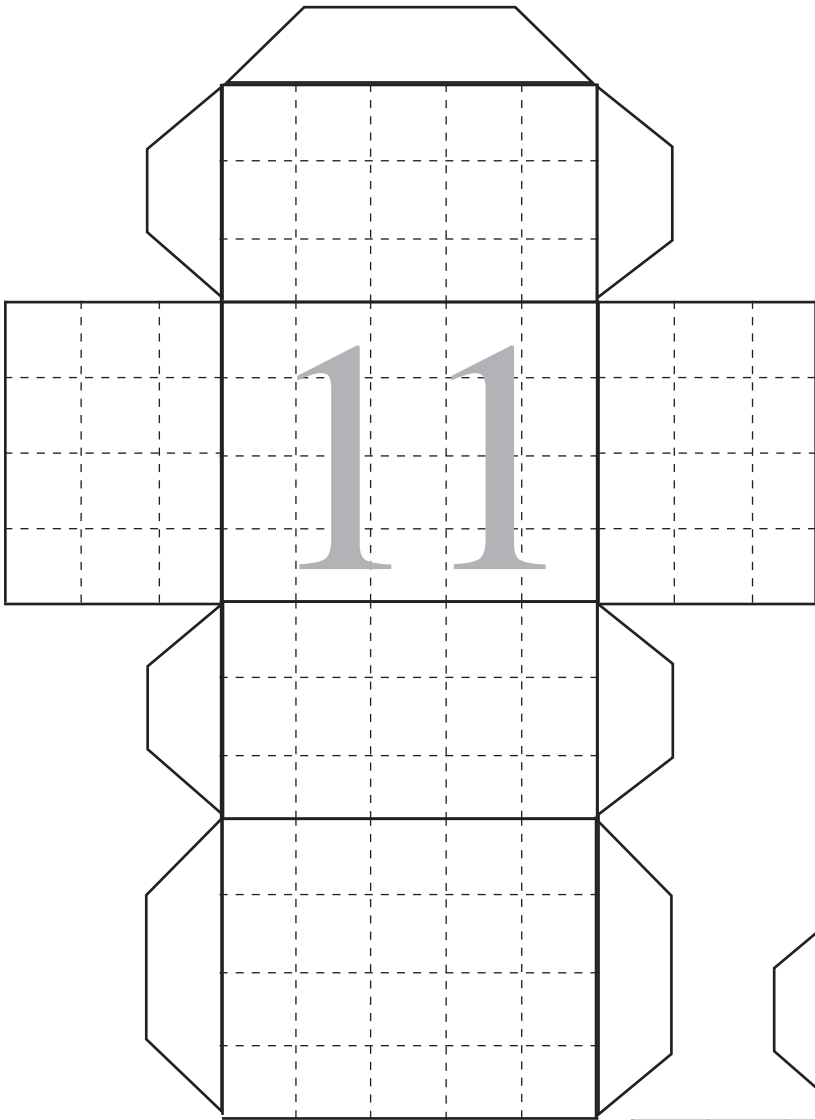


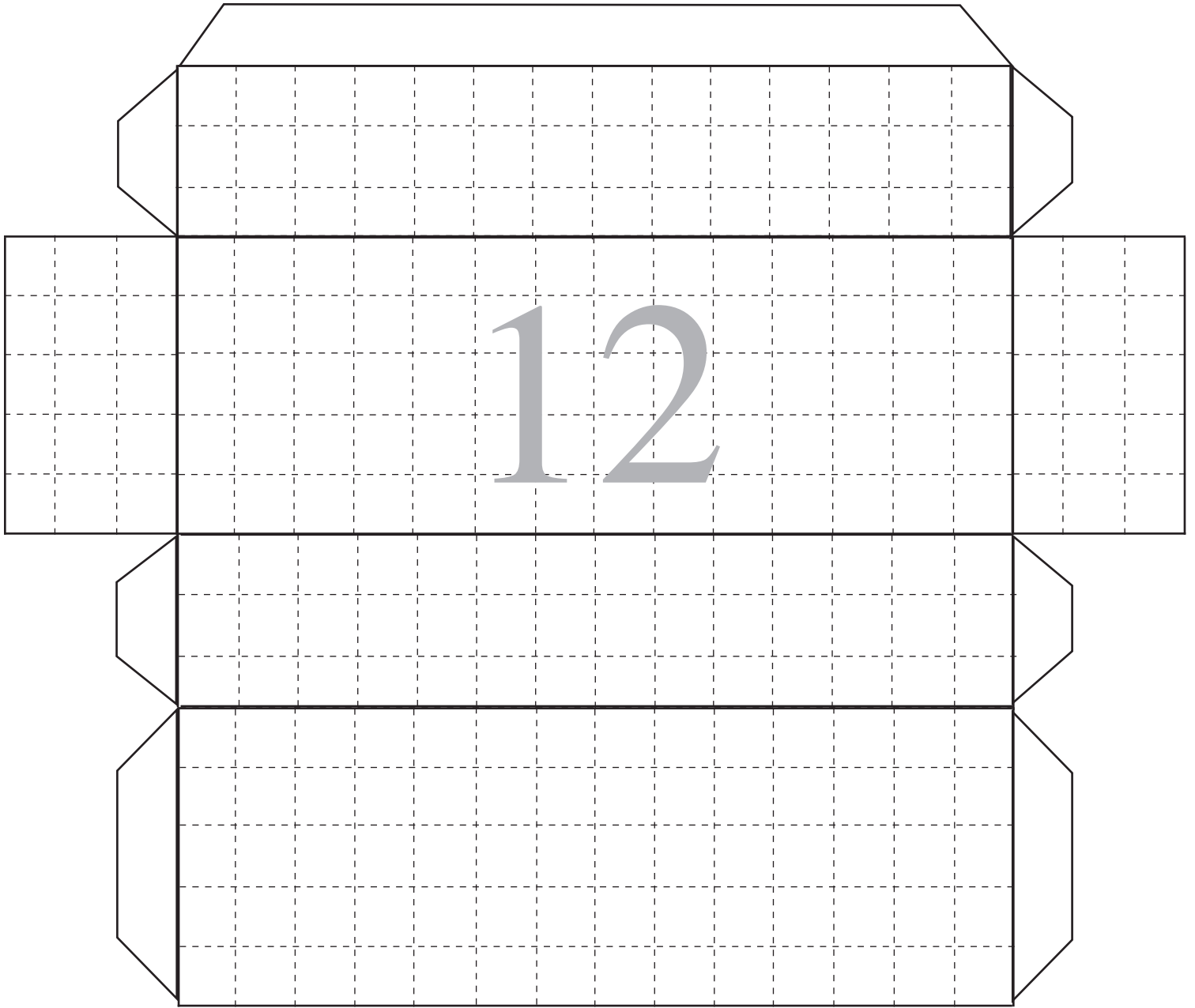


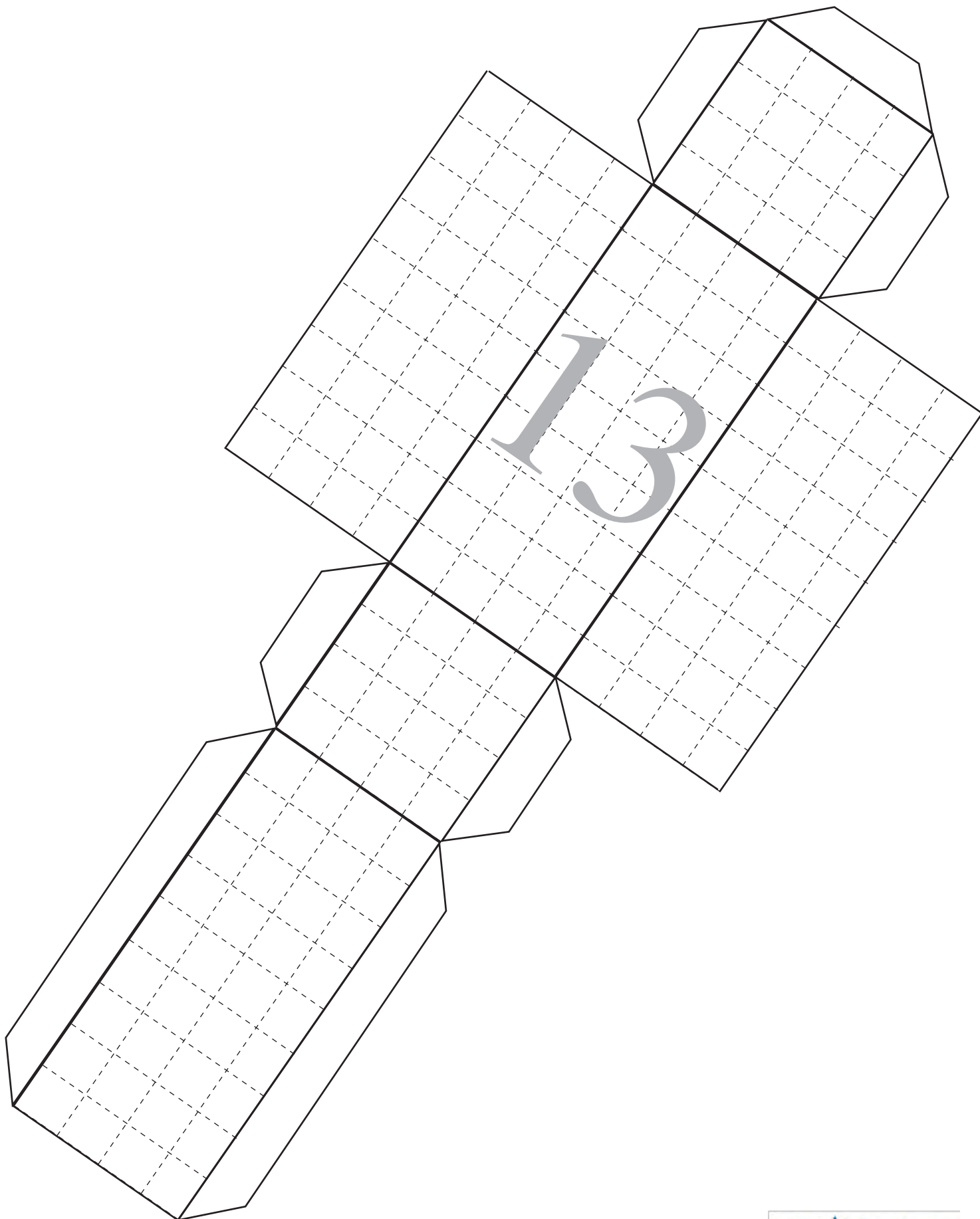


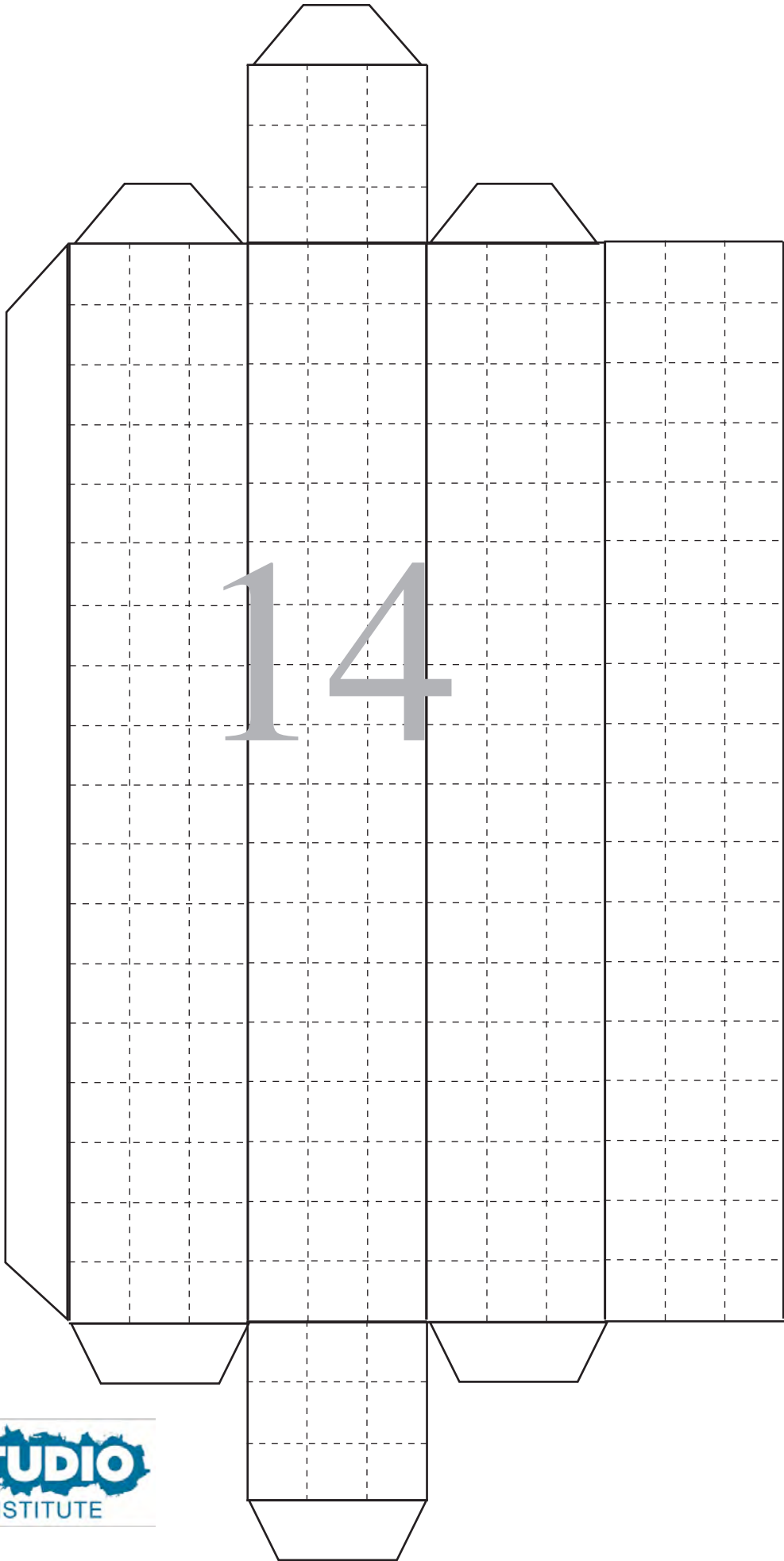
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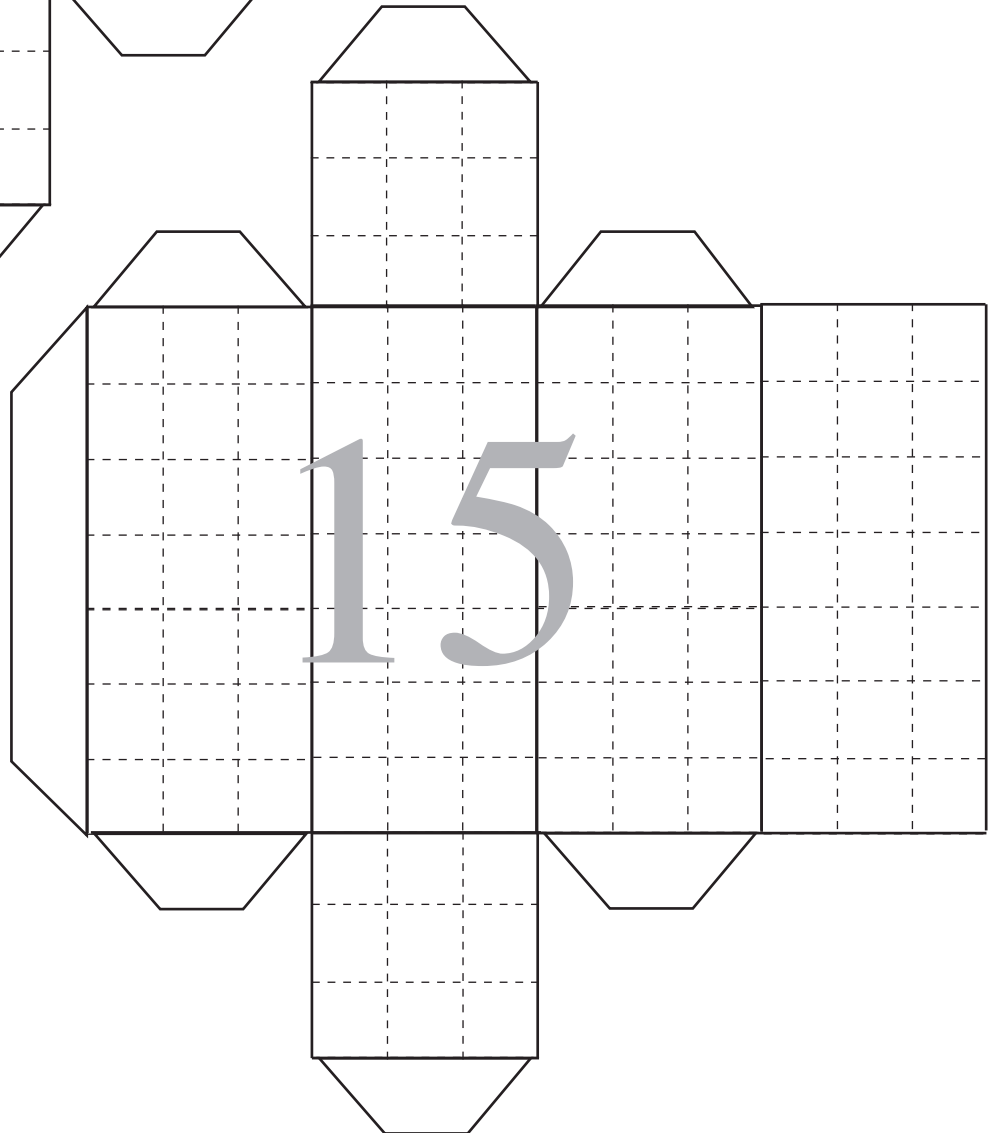
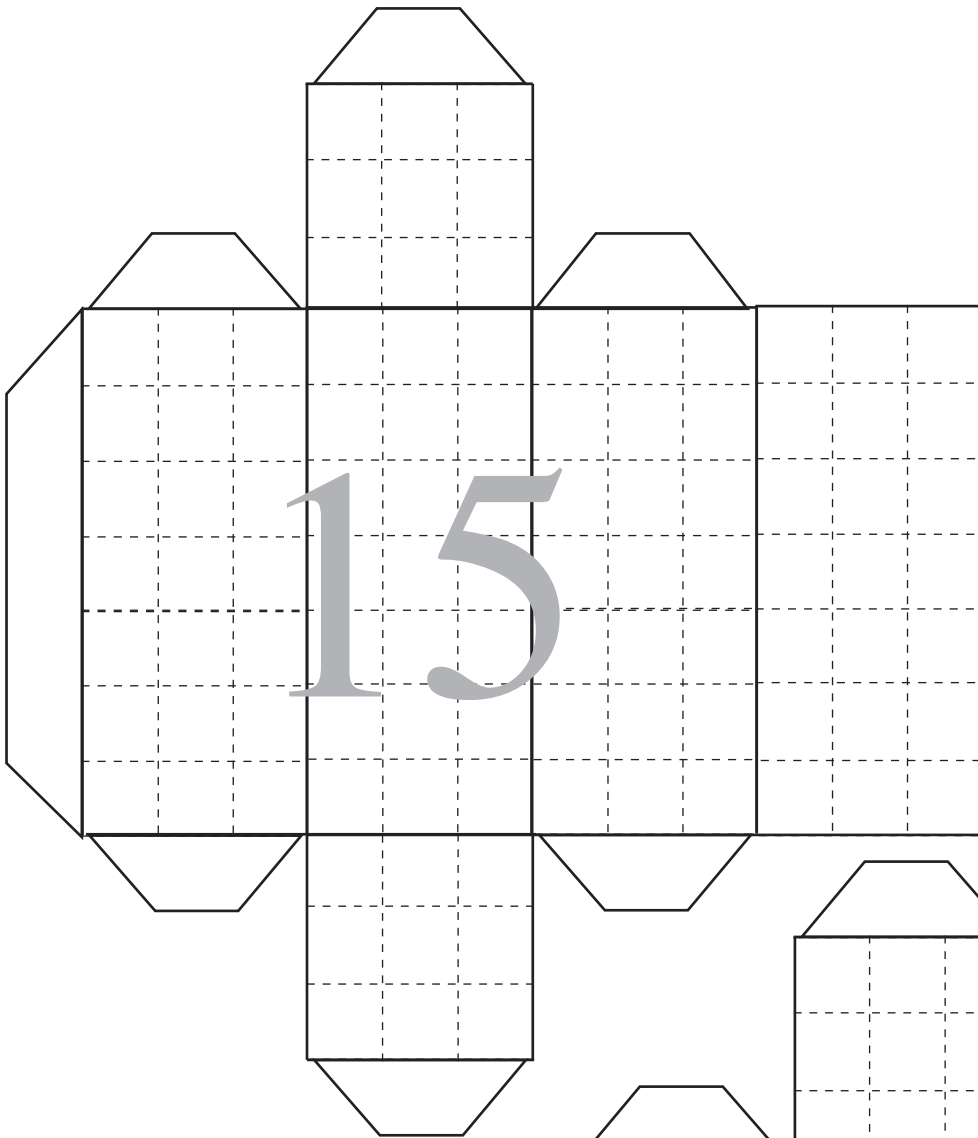


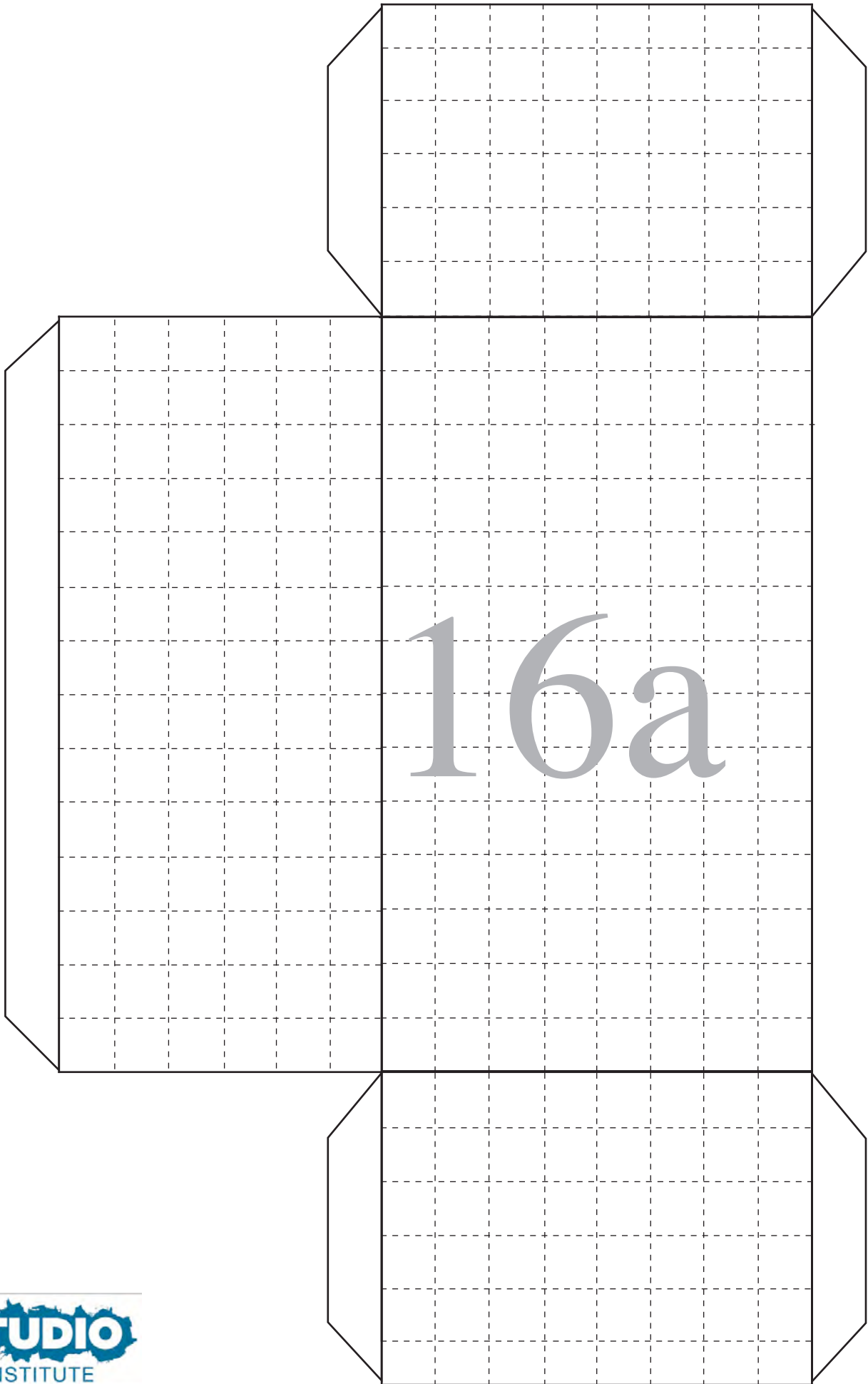












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